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NESTING NOTES AT TACOMA IN 1922.

By E. A. Kitchin.

Nesting in and about Tacoma was late in starting this year (1922); probably a week or ten days later than what might be considered a normal season.

We did not have such a cold wet spring, but we had no hot weather which goes far to start the first birds nest building. Our Tulé Wrens are about the first to lay, and in normal years full sets of eggs should be found about March 25, but this year the first complete set was found on April 4 and this difference seemed to follow all down the line with the majority of our nesting birds.

Though the birds were late getting started, they were certainly not shy in numbers. The woods and swamps were full of bird life, such a difference from last year when there was a noticeable scarcity through the nesting season. Just why this should occur is a subject hard to explain.

Comparing the nesting season just closed with past years, one finds many changes with the local birds; whether these changes will be permanent remains to be seen. Certainly there is a big increase in some varieties while others seem to grow less and less each year. Space prohibits me from describing all the different varieties found nesting this spring, but touching on different groups might prove of some interest.

One of the most pleasing and interesting changes is the rapid increase of ducks breeding in our swamps and lakes near by. Our famous South Tacoma swamp was literally alive with birds of all kinds with the wild ducks probably the most interesting of the many kinds that stopped to breed.

Several years ago Mallards, with an occasional Cinnamon Teal, were about the only ducks that stopped here to breed. Then came a few Ruddy Ducks, while this year the swamp seemed to be full of Ruddies and Mallards, and we added Shovelers, Pintails and Baldpates to our records. In one place of open water that was constantly observed, four drakes spent the entire incubation period together, namely: Shoveler, Baldpate, Pintail and Cinnamon Teal; and a more handsome quartet would be hard to find.

It is very gratifying to note this increase and while our new laws have helped bring this about, another strong reason is that without doubt the constant draining of lakes and swamps east of the Cascade Mountains has had a strong tendency to drive the breeding ducks of our state west of the mountains where they not only find a safe place to breed, but also abundance of food for themselves and, later, the young.

Four Gadwall were observed on several occasions late in the spring, but whether they remained to nest was not recorded. Ten or twelve pairs of Buffleheads, all mated, stayed on a small lake near Roy, but all were gone before nesting time. On May 10, on a small lake near Shelton, a pair of Harlequin Ducks were observed at very close range. This small and retiring little couple spent most of the day squatted on a water-logged trunk of a tree close to shore, and allowed an approach of thirty feet before taking to flight. It was too early for their nesting but they no doubt did later. A pair of Loons were also on this lake but though we found their nest on a floating log, we were evidently too early for eggs.

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These last records are mentioned only to show how gratifying it is to have these birds linger with us so much longer than they formerly did, and there is no doubt in our minds that these and others will soon join the ranks of our breeding ducks and nest in this locality. The proposition of the Government to buy and create breeding grounds for our wild ducks is a fine one, and no better place or location could be found than this South Tacoma swamp, which is so full of vegetation, and an ideal breeding ground for all our swamp birds.

Killdeer, the only shore bird observed nesting, showed quite an extended season. On May 6 three large young were seen following their parents over some gravelly ground, while the eggs of another pair were observed and photographed on June 20.

Though no nests of the Oregon Ruffed Grouse were found, several families of young were seen and we have every reason to believe they had a successful breeding season. I came on one mother bird with a bunch of tiny young crossing a country road. The road was full of deep ruts, and the little ones were having a hard time crossing. I stayed on guard until the troublesome journey was accomplished by the little family, as a passing automobile might have raised havoc with the downy babies.

Sooty Grouse were late in nesting. Small sets seemed the rule, since two nests contained six eggs each while one brood just hatched on June 15 numbered six young. I flushed a bird off one fresh egg, but she deserted and no more eggs were layed.

No nests were found of the California Quail, nor young seen. On May 23 a Mountain Quail was seen and heard in a bit of brushy land, evidently standing guard over a female on eggs.

A marked increase was observed in the Hungarian Partridge recently planted on our open prairies. Several pairs were flushed, though no nests were found. Their flight was short and generally just over some swale or hill, reminding one of miniature Prairie Chickens and their cackle was much the same.

Several large flocks of Band-tailed Pigeons in the fir tree-tops were observed about May 1, but no nests were found during the season. This bird shows a remarkable increase, as singles and pairs were observed throughout the season in many localities, our gulches being their favorite resorts.

Nesting notes on the birds of prey are few in this locality, especially with the hawks, as very few stay to breed. In our wanderings, two pairs of Western Redtails were observed, the birds were very much in evidence, but their nests were probably placed high in some fir, not visible from the ground. One pair of Cooper's Hawks was located, but Mr. J. Hooper Bowles was fortunate enough to shoot the male bird and so broke up a family that later would have caused the loss of many song birds.

I spent one day, May 1, on the Tacoma tide flats, and though I flushed two Short-eared Owls, no nest was found, but they undoubtedly had one hidden in the long slough grass. One nest of the Kennicott's Screech Owl with two downy young was found on May 25.

An interesting note was the recording of the presence of a California Pygmy Owl in a dense wood on May 2, with the lower half of what looked like a Lutescent Warbler in its claws. This is a late record, but there is no doubt that a few of these little owls breed with us, although no nest has yet been recorded. It's a treat in store for some lucky oölogist.

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With the exception of the Northwestern Flicker, few woodpeckers were observed breeding this spring. An old cedar swamp that last year contained several pairs of Lewis's Woodpeckers held none this year, although the swamp was visited many times. In normal years it is a common sight to see ten or twenty of these birds on the fence posts of some prairie field, but this year only one bird was seen all season.

One nest of the Harris's Woodpecker was found on May 5, the hole being seven feet up in an alder stub, a low location. The birds were busy feeding the young, and from the volume of "hissing" that issued from the cavity they must have been well grown, meaning fresh eggs on April 15, an early date.

One pair of Gairdner's Woodpeckers were observed feeding young on June 20, a late date, but this pair had been driven from their old nesting tree earlier in the season by a pair of flickers who had enlarged the last year's nest of the Gairdner's and had taken possession.

Pacific Nighthawks were first seen on May 30 and a pair that always chooses the roof of a certain building as a nesting site had eggs on July 11, a week later than last year.

There was a heavy migration of Rufous Hummingbirds in early April, most of which passed through. Nesting seemed late for them; the first nest I found on May 25, while another on May 29 was built over the last year's nest in a low bush.

The Flycatcher family was well represented both in numbers and varieties. No nests of the Olive-sided nor Hammond's were found, but several pairs of birds of each variety were seen. Hammond's have never been numerous here, but the Olive-sided seemed more plentiful than in recent years. The Western and Traill's Flycatchers were common; eggs of the former were ready to hatch on May 29. On nest of Traill's, containing three incubated eggs was placed in a small fir tree, about six feet up, - an unusual site. I hunted hard to find a Western Wood Pewee's nest on July 8; the male bird hung around a bunch of oak trees, but I did not find the nest.

Two pairs of Steller's Jays were under observation in a gulch near our house. One pair started nest building in a small fir about March 28, but did not have a full set of eggs until April 8. The other pair, though always seen and apparently mated as early as the others, did not have their eggs until May 12. This nest was placed in an over-hanging bush on the side of a gulch and could be reached without climbing. Both nests were directly over a path as were three others out of the seven nests located this year.

Western Crows were very common and show an increase each year. Without doubt they cause great havoc, destroying and eating other birds' eggs and small young, especially the ground-nesting birds. Western Meadowlarks, I believe, suffer most, but the Rusty Song Sparrows and Nuttall's Sparrows know this black demon only too well. A pair of each of the last mentioned birds built nests and hatched their young in the field across from our house. The nests were both robbed of the young before they were feathered, though the nests themselves were not touched nor harmed. Feeling curious about this I arose at daybreak one morning and in looking over the field saw a crow on the ground busily seeking his breakfast; and my neighbor informed me he was there every morning. No doubt where the young birds went!

The South Tacoma swamp had its usual quota of Northwestern Red-winged Blackbirds, and a considerable increase of Brewer's Blackbirds was noted

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on the Tacoma tide flats where the land had been lately dyked and drained. On May 1 many were seen in pairs, but no nests located on that date.

Several flocks of Western Evening Grosbeaks, also several pairs, were located in a wood near Chamber's Creek early in June, but though I watched for a long time I did not see any sign of nest building. I was out after them again on June 25, and saw several birds again and heard more, but they were all in the tops of our highest firs and little could be learned. It would seem possible that these birds were nesting and also that their nests were in these high trees, perfectly safe.

The California Purple Finch seemed scarce this year and no nests were located. The Pine Siskins were also very scarce and not a pair was seen or even mated before July 1. Since then three pairs were seen which by their actions had not nested.

Willow Goldfinches seemed normal with the nesting somewhat irregular. One nest had feathered young on July 2, while another contained fresh eggs on July 5.

The Sparrow family was well represented in numbers, and nests of all varieties that breed here were found and observed. All seemed late in starting, especially the Shufeldt's Junco and a nest of the Rusty Song Sparrow contained one fresh egg on July 8.

Several nests of Black-headed Grosbeak were found, three of which were in maples directly over a path on the gulch side, none higher than eight feet up and one only four feet. One nest had four eggs and two others three young each. Beside being very beautiful, I consider this bird the sweetest singer we have, very like the Brown Thrasher of the East.

There seemed to be a big increase in Tree Swallows, in fact all the Swallow family was well represented, but the nesting dates were rather late. Northern Violet-greens had fresh eggs on June 15, while Rough-wings had fresh eggs as late as June 25. One colony of Cliff Swallows had a hard time nesting. About thirty pairs chose a certain farm house and started masonic operations, but the owner thought differently and once a week knocked down their nests. This happened several times before they left for some more generous landlord. I came to hate this man for destroying the nests of this colony once a week, and felt good afterward when I heard he had been caught running a "blind pig." It served him right!

Cassin's Vireos were late in nesting, though somewhat spasmodic. Of five nests found on June 4, one nest was just started, another almost complete, the third had one egg, the fourth a complete set of four, while the fifth had four young with the female bird on. I stroked her back and finally had to lift her from the nest to see what she covered. I have had this happen several times -- they will not flush when they are brooding small young.

If any Western Warbling Vireos hatched a full set of eggs, I did not find it. I examined five nests that held incomplete sets, all in different stages of incubation, and in two cases the nests were later robbed and the eggs taken. Just who the robber was I do not know, but strongly suspect the Steller's Jay.

With one exception the warblers seem to be getting scarcer near Tacoma as breeding birds. The Audubon's Warbler that formerly was quite common, according to Mr. Bowles, is now quite rare; no nests were found this spring and only a few of the birds were observed. This same change applies to the Black-throated Gray, only one nest with the young being found. Macgillivray's Warblers seem to be coming back

NESTING NOTES AT TACOMA IN 1922. (Cont.)

after an absence of several years and quite a few Golden Pileolated were seen at nesting time, though no nests were found.

Hermit Warblers seem to be coming more plentifully and their song could be heard in nearly every wood. No nests were found this year as nearly all must nest in the tops of our high firs. To follow the male's actions at this height is impossible, though I have spent many a half hour trying to discover their nest through the bird's actions.

Of all the birds observed this spring, the Tulé Wren in the South Tacoma swamp shows the greatest increase. They always were numerous but this year the swamp was fairly alive with them, and their song and scolding notes were heard at all times, everywhere. They nested later than usual. Some of the nests placed in bare bushes were plainly visible, while many were built in the dead ruches and were quite hard to see. Sets of five and six eggs were the rule. One pair built a nest that interested us. They had found an old quilt that some one had thrown in the swamp and had pulled out the white cotton and made their nests of it, which were plainly seen at a hundred feet against the green rushes. The decoy nest was placed twenty feet from the occupied nest, and as the time for eggs came the birds had woven quite a bit of rushes in the home nest so it was not so conspicuous. This pair layed six eggs which were collected, as well as the two nests, and it was pleasing and interesting to note that three weeks later they had built two new nests with the cotton and were still busy "carrying on"; there are no dull moments with the Tulé. This is our first record of this bird using other material than rushes or cat-tails for nesting material, with feathers for lining.

Seattle Wrens had a long nesting season, though apparently late in starting. Young were seen on April 24, while a nest with fresh eggs was found on May 24. The approach of civilization does not seem to disturb them as much as it does the Western Winter Wren. The latter is a lover of dark woods and they seem to withdraw from old haunts as civilization encroaches and the woods are destroyed.

The California Creeper is getting to be more common in our woods than in former years, brought about, I think, largely through the efforts of Mr. Bowles in establishing decoy nests for them to breed in. It's a curious fact, but none the less true, that the birds choosing these artificial nests had better luck and results than the birds that chose natural sites to nest in. One reason, I think, is that the natural sites are likely to let in the rain, which makes the bird desert, while we know that the large land snail found in some of our deep woods has a liking for their eggs, as I have found them busy sucking the eggs while the bird sat brooding.

One could easily fill a book on the actions and ways of the Red-breasted Nuthatch during the nesting season, but we have no space here. We call it "the bird that meditates" as one often sees this little fellow stop on some tree trunk, head downward and--apparently--reasoning out some thought. He is the enigma of the bird man and when you have a rule worked out regarding his nesting, a visit to his abode will destroy all ideas such as finding a nest just completed, when they should have a full set of eggs, and again finding young when you expect fresh eggs. Sometimes the hole is covered with pitch and the next has none.

The Chestnut-backed Chickadee was very numerous, with small sets of six eggs the rule, while the Oregon Chickadee was not often observed. Fresh eggs of the former were found on May 5 and as late as June 10.

Bush-Tits were very scarce, so much so that we spent considerable time looking for them, and only two nests were discovered during the season.

Why this little bird was scarce this year is hard to explain, unless they had a bad winter. We had two or three snowstorms that might have brought fatality to their ranks.

Western Golden-crowned Kinglets were plentiful and a nest of fresh eggs was found on April 25 while the tiny brood of a second set was found on July 7. One nest was beautifully lined with the crimson feathers of the Ring-necked Pheasant. As a rule the second sets are built lower than the first; my experience is to look over fifteen feet for the early sets and from six to fifteen feet for second sets.

For several years past, the Varied Thrush has become more plentiful as a breeding bird, but this year shows quite a setback. Very few birds were seen during the nesting season, and none in some of the woods that had been their breeding locality for several years past. This is very disappointing to the bird men here, as we all hope that this bird was following the actions of the Robin in becoming reconciled and attracted to civilization. However, this might just be an off year and we can at least hope they will be more plentiful in the future. Once this spring, in making the sharp turn in a path, I came on a full grown bird of the year with the male parent bird. The young bird had the speckled breast of the young robin, contrasting greatly with the old male who was in truly gorgeous plumage, much more brilliant than the bird we see in the winter at our door step.

DISTRIBUTION OF DOUGLAS GROUND SQUIRRELS IN WASHINGTON STATE.

By Leo K. Couch.

The Douglas Ground Squirrel (*Citellus douglasii*) belongs to the group of ground squirrels common to California and western Oregon. In this group is the California Ground Squirrel (*Citellus beecheyi*) characterized by bushy tails, tall ears, and large size. The Douglas Ground Squirrel on the other hand, is distinguished by a black patch the shape of a wedge, which lies on the back between the shoulders.

As stated, the normal distribution of the Douglas Squirrel is in northern California and western Oregon. However, it was recently discovered occupying a small area north of the Columbia River in western Klickitat County, Wash. In August and September, 1918, Mr. George G. Cantwell, while on a field trip collecting for the Biological Survey, reported this squirrel in the neighborhood of White Salmon. He stated that the residents first noticed it in 1912 on the Bingen Flats along the Columbia. The species is numerous at Hood River, Oregon, a chance migration across the river having taken place by some means. The nearest bridges are at Vancouver and Fallbridge, but investigation does not show this squirrel to be present at the Washington ends of the Bridges.

At the present time this ground squirrel covers about 5,000 acres between White Salmon and Lyle along Burdoin Mountain. This country is very rough, rising from the river to a height of 1,800 feet. The slopes are covered with oak, fir and hazel, thus affording a typical habitat. Burrows are made under many rock slides, making homes which are often occupied by rattlesnakes. A few colonies have been noticed at the top of the gorge, showing the rapidity with which they migrate.

In July, 1919, when a survey and efforts at control were made, many young ground squirrels were seen migrating up the mountain. When pursued they became panic-stricken, running in one direction, then in another. Investigation did not disclose any burrows in the vicinity.

Due to careful poisoning operations of the Biological Survey the area of distribution has not increased beyond the limits of 1920; and as the oak-covered district is small this tends to limit the area which the Douglas Ground Squirrel might eventually cover.
